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ABSTRACT

A study examined the types of support given to teachers pursuing certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). NBPTS has developed advanced standards for teachers in 27 fields. Teachers seeking NBPTS certification must prepare a comprehensive portfolio and take part in a day-long evaluation process at an assessment center. Surveys were returned by 275 rural teachers in seven states. Thirty-one percent indicated their principals did not give them any support. Principal support reported by the other 191 rural teachers included words of encouragement, release time or less duty time, public recognition, use of school equipment, and letters of recommendation. Among the most frequently mentioned responses, teachers felt that their principal could have supported them by providing release time, becoming more knowledgeable about the NBPTS process, sharing emotional/verbal support, giving some form of public recognition, assisting with video taping or purchasing equipment, reading the teacher's materials, and acknowledging the time spent in the process. Support people other than principals included family members, faculty or colleagues, other NBPTS teacher candidates or teachers, friends, and university faculty members. The rural teachers who earned national certification reported how they toiled in isolation, but the majority felt the time and effort was worth the result. Respondents indicated that they had become more effective teachers as a result of their experience. (TD)

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Who Will Teach Our Children?

Rural National Board Certified Teachers' Experiences

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Introduction

In 1986, the Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession released the report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. The report recommended the establishment of a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). In 1987, the National Board was created as an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization governed by a 63-member board of directors. Most of the directors are classroom teachers. The remaining members are school administrators, school board teachers, governors and state legislators, higher education officials, teacher union leaders, and business and community leaders.

A system of advanced standards and assessments forms the basis for the National Board Certification. The standards grow out of the NBPTS central policy statement, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*. The five core propositions are:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to teachers.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

The National Board is developing advanced standards for teachers in more than 31 certification fields. Currently, standards have been developed in 27 fields. These certificates are structured around student developmental levels (early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, adolescence, and young adulthood) as well as by subject area. The standards are

developed by committees of teachers and other experts, are reviewed extensively, and then are presented to the board of directors for approval.

A teacher who wants National Board Certification must participate in a two-part assessment process. One component of the assessment is done at the teacher's school. The teacher prepares a portfolio that includes video tapes of classroom teaching, lesson plans, samples of student work, and written commentaries that focus upon the teacher's reflections of what was done and why it was done. The second part of the assessment process is contained in day-long exercises completed at an assessment center.

The current fee for the certification assessment is $2,300, and $300 is due with the teacher's application. Individual states have appropriated funds to pay part or all of the certification fees. Florida, for instance, through the Excellent Teaching Program Act, has legislation that provides $12 million to pay 90 percent of the certification fee. In addition, teachers who achieve National Board Certification receive a 10 percent salary increase for each of the ten years of the certificate and an additional 10 percent bonus is awarded to those who mentor newly hired teachers or who serve as support mentors for NBCT candidates. Individual school districts have the option to provide successful candidates with additional salary supplements.

There is at least one Nationally Board Certified teacher in each of the 50 states. As of November 30, 2000, there have been 9,531 certificates awarded. More than 13,000 candidates are seeking certification in 2000-2001. Two thousand three hundred seventy-seven teachers in North Carolina hold certificates. Other states with large numbers of Nationally Board Certified teachers are Florida with 1,267, Ohio with 913, and California with 785.

More than 1,300 teachers hold the Middle Childhood–Generalist (ages 7–12) Certificate. Their numbers are followed closely by the more than 1,100 teachers who have the Early Childhood–Generalist (ages 3–8) Certificate.

National Board Teachers' Responses from Six States

Late in 2000, announcements and recognition of the teachers who earned the National Certification began to appear in newspaper articles and on television programs. There are seven states where large numbers of National Board Certified Teachers reside. In addition to the previously identified states of North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, and California are Illinois, South Carolina, and Mississippi.

The National Board was interested in having me replicate a study I conducted the previous year. That study focused on the type of support the principals of the schools where these teachers worked gave the teachers. A doctoral student is working on the replication of my study with the Florida teachers, while I sought information from the teachers in the other seven states. Survey forms were mailed to more than 2,000 National Board Certified teachers in the spring of 2001. Table 1 reflects the number of completed surveys that were received and where the schools were located.

Table 1. School Location of NBCT Respondents

	STATE						
School Type	**CA**	**IL**	**MS**	**NC**	**OH**	**SC**	**Total**
Elementary School	81	18	33	138	48	42	360
Middle School	19	8	17	61	18	0	123
Junior High School	1	2	5	1	4	23	36
High School	44	13	21	105	36	39	258
Total	145	41	76	305	106	104	777

The number of teachers at the schools that were identified as being situated in either rural, urban, or suburban locations are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. School Type by School Location

	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Total
Elementary School	124	128	107	359
Middle School	49	61	30	140
Junior High School	9	4	0	13
High School	93	94	67	254
Total	275	287	204	766*

** Not all teachers reported where the school was located.*

The focus of this paper will be on the responses made to the survey questions by the rural teachers at all school designations. Those questions were:

- Did your principal support your efforts to earn National Board Certification?
- What types of support did you receive from the principal?
- What do you wish your principal would have done to support you?
- What, or who, were other support services you had during the year?
- How have your colleagues reacted to your recognition?
- How have your colleagues reacted to your recognition?

Eighty-four, or 31 percent, of the 275 rural teachers indicated their principals did not give them any support.

Examples of Principal Support

These most frequently mentioned types of support were reported in rank order by the other 191 rural teachers at all school locations:

Part of receiving any type of recognition is how others react to that recognition. The four most frequently made responses to that question from the rural teachers follow:

- Complimentary notes/congratulations cards
- Supportive comments made orally
- Were indifferent/jealous
- Became interested in the process

The concluding section of the survey focused on the thoughts/comments and suggestions the successful candidates would offer to those who follow them in seeking the national recognition. The top three responses from the 275 rural teachers were:

- The process is long, but a very fulfilling experience.
- Develop a small study/resource group to work through the process.
- Start early, pace yourself, and keep materials organized.

Conclusion

The rural teachers from the seven states who worked very hard to earn the National Certification shared many honest comments and reactions about their experiences. Many of their comments revealed how they toiled in isolation of support from others, but the majority of them felt the time and efforts were worth the final result. The rural teachers in this study indicated they had become more effective teachers as a result of their experience.

So what can school principals do to support teachers who are interested in completing the NBPTS certification process?

- Provided words of encouragement/kept updated
- Provided release days or less duty time
- Gave public recognition (newsletter, school marquee message)
- Allowed use of school equipment (video camera, copy machine, special microphones)
- Wrote a letter of recommendation

The rural National Board teachers' most frequently mentioned responses to what their principal could have done to support them were:

- Provided release time, days/substitutes
- No other assistance—help by not helping
- Become more knowledgeable about the NBPTS process
- Shared emotional/verbal support
- Given some form of public recognition
- Provided assistance with video taping and/or purchasing equipment
- Reading the teacher's materials
- Provided acknowledgment of the time spent in the process

The rural teachers indicated who else provided help or support to them. These frequently mentioned support people included:

- Family members
- Faculty or colleagues
- Other NBCT teacher candidates or NBCT teachers
- Friends
- University faculty members

- Become knowledgeable about the NBPTS certification process by contacting the organization at 1-800-22TEACH or at the web site *http://www.nbpts.org*.
- Provide the needed background information, supplies, and technology for the candidates.
- Allow candidates to become involved with NBPTS support programs operating within a school district, a university, through teacher labor organizations, or private groups or foundations.
- Offer to open the school so the candidates can work on weekends and school holidays.
- Provide words of encouragement along with other overt examples of support during the process.
- Assume some of the teacher's duties.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of the candidates along the way and at the end of the process.